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SUBJECT: USAID Assessment of Food Security  
Activities in Kenya's Kitui District

#### Summary

1. Agricultural inputs provided by USAID/OFDA partner Catholic Relief Services (CRS) improved crop production and diversification among vulnerable farmers in Kenya's Kitui District despite a poor short rains in 2005. Farmers saved seeds from the last harvest and are preparing to plant this season. Recommended activities to further boost food security in the district include livelihood fairs, as well as outreach and education on optimal farming methods. End Summary.

2. On April 13, a USAID assessment team traveled to Kitui District in Kenya's Eastern Province to assess the effects of drought on the agricultural communities and view the impact of USAID/OFDA-funded seed fair programs. The team included USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor for East and Central Africa, USAID/OFDA Agriculture and Food Security Advisor, and USAID/FFP Kenya Backstop.

#### USAID/OFDA Seed Fair Program in Kitui District

3. In Ikanga town, the assessment team visited a group of women beneficiaries of a USAID/OFDA-funded seed fair program implemented by CRS. Successive failed rainy seasons and poor crop production in 2005 left agricultural communities with scarce inputs for the 2005/2006 season. In December 2005, CRS conducted a series of seed fairs in Kitui District, targeting 4,000 vulnerable households.

4. The CRS Seed Fair intervention is designed to

strengthen marginal farmers and the local agricultural supply infrastructure by providing farmer choice and support to local seed systems. Through the exchange of vouchers, local farmers are linked to local seed producers and input vendors to prepare for the agriculture season. Farmers also benefit from extension services and demonstration plots that introduce drought tolerant crop varieties. Benefits of the program include keeping money for agricultural inputs in the local community and at times increasing the use of improved local seed varieties among farmers.

¶5. The program provided beneficiaries access to more than 77,000 kilos of pigeonpea, green gram, cowpea, millet, and sorghum seed. Noticeably absent from the seed fairs was maize. As maize is poorly adapted for the dry climactic conditions in the region, farmers who plant it get minimal results, resulting in ill-used land, labor, and seeds. CRS offered a variety of seed to encourage farmer adoption of better climactically suited choices and to increase food security through greater production.

¶6. In addition to seed, CRS provided small packets of fertilizer at the seed fairs on an experimental basis. CRS provided beneficiaries with training for correct application. Some beneficiaries did not apply the fertilizer due to inadequate climactic conditions?the women were told to use the fertilizer once the plants are six inches high and when the ground is moist. When asked if they would have chosen more seeds

or fertilizer if they had to use their vouchers, answers varied based on an assessment of their land's fertility. In the future, if fertilizer is part of a seed fair, farmers should purchase the packets with their vouchers based on their decision and estimation of need. As it is an expensive input, beneficiaries should "pay" even with vouchers so that the decision is made with real cost in mind.

¶7. In Kitui, 70 percent of the year's crops are harvested during the November-January season while the other 30 percent is produced between April and June. CRS reports that farmers throughout Kitui District harvested only 10 percent of the November-January crops due to erratic and poorly distributed rains. According to CRS, millet performed best, with sorghum and cow peas following.

¶8. In Ikanga town, where the short rains were relatively steady, beneficiaries managed to harvest a surprising amount?some reporting yields of up to 200 kilos?and most managed to save some seed for the current planting season. One woman planted two kilos of green grams on her two-acre farm and reaped two 90-kilo bags of grain. She saved one-half of a bag for family and sold the other one and a half bags. With this money she paid school fees for her children and helped less fortunate households in the community. With the recent arrival of the long rains, the women are enthusiastic about the next season and are preparing to plant.

¶9. Nearly all beneficiaries had sourced maize seed on their own and had harvested some. While the beneficiaries all agreed that millet and sorghum outperformed the maize in the last season, increased outreach and education is

required in order to increase the use of more well-adapted crops. In regards to why the women continued to plant maize, they said they were not accustomed to using sorghum in recipes and that their children preferred the taste of maize. In addition, the women had trouble keeping birds out of the millet.

#### Observations

¶10. Despite saving seeds from last season's harvest, beneficiaries asked when the seed would be coming this year. Although this is a common response, it highlights the importance of discussing exit strategies early and often with beneficiaries. CRS should respond to these enquiries with a discussion of exit strategy. Ideally, implementing partners should discuss end limits of programs with beneficiaries from the very beginning. The objective of the program is to strengthen local seed systems and enable farmer choice.

¶11. The women explained that they were not asking for seeds for themselves, rather because those who saved seeds would be expected to share with farmers who had none. The request could signal either an increased need in the district this season or a miscalculation in targeting, meaning that the most vulnerable may have been missed. CRS will work with community groups to

identify and target the most vulnerable members for upcoming seed fairs in July.

¶12. Despite CRS's efforts to disseminate information on improved agricultural methods, farmers were planting seeds every time it rained and spacing was haphazard at the farms visited. Enhanced agriculture extension activities should complement future seed distribution programs. Discussions on optimal planting methods should accompany seed fairs to further enhance productive capacity. Since the last harvest, CRS and Kenyan Ministry of Agriculture staff have capitalized on monthly food distribution forums to educate communities on dryland crop production and soil fertility in an effort to enhance agricultural capability prior to the current planting season.

¶12. Based on the success of the program and the need to further support livelihoods in the area through diversification of income generation, a potential future intervention could be a livelihoods fair in which beneficiaries are entitled to choose among seeds, small livestock (for example, goats or rabbits), and tools.

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